



CREATIVE CHOICES

In this issue:

- AMBIS Annual Meeting..... 1
 - 2013 Funeral Home Survey 1
 - FCA's Nationwide Work 2
 - LLI End-of-Life Options Course 2
 - Swan Songs 2
 - Thanks to Our Supporting Members 3
 - President's Message 5
 - When a U.S. Citizen Dies Abroad..... 5
- Winter 2013

The newsletter of the Austin Memorial and Burial Information Society (AMBIS)

AMBIS ANNUAL MEETING

Saturday, February 16, 2013
2:00 to 4:00 p.m.

St. James Episcopal Church
1941 Webberville Road, Austin, TX 78721

For nearly 50 years, AMBIS has been encouraging everyone to complete advance directives and to talk about their end-of-life wishes with family, close friends, physicians, and caregivers. With increasing frequency, the importance of these conversations is being discussed in newspapers and magazines and on television and the internet. For a real-life view of how all this applies to you, be sure to attend our annual meeting on February 16.

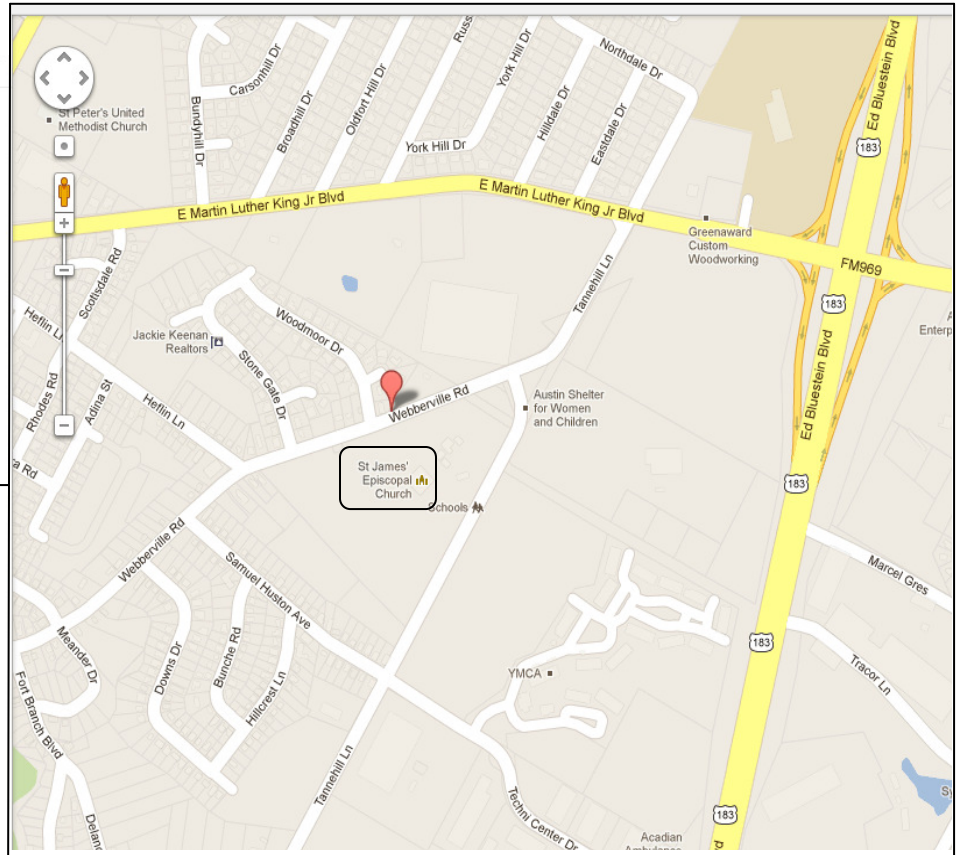
At the meeting, we will also be honoring Lamar Hankins for his outstanding service to AMBIS and the national FCA. Within months of joining AMBIS in 1993, Lamar became newsletter editor and began producing our annual funeral home survey. In addition, he served on the AMBIS Council for 10 years, as president from 1997 to 2002. He also served as president of the FCA Board and still serves as legal adviser to AMBIS, FCA, and the FCA of Texas.

Directions from IH-35:

1. Take MLK Blvd. exit and head east.
2. Turn right at the light onto Tannehill Lane.
3. Bear right onto Webberville Rd.
4. The church will be on the left.

Directions from US 183 South (Ed Bluestein Blvd.):

1. Take MLK Blvd. exit and head west towards downtown.
2. Turn left onto Tannehill Lane.
3. Bear right onto Webberville Rd.
4. The church will be on your left.



2013 FUNERAL HOME SURVEY UNDERWAY

As this newsletter goes to press, AMBIS volunteers are collecting General Price Lists and Casket Price Lists from the 50 funeral homes in our five-county service area.

The survey will be available on February 16. You may pick one up at the annual meeting or download it from our web site. You are also welcome to come by our office (Suite 112) in the AGE Building on the corner of Cedar and West 38th Streets, a block west of Speedway. Volunteers

are usually in the office between 10 a.m. and 2 p.m. on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays.

If you would prefer us to mail the survey to you, please call our office at 480-0555, or email office@fcaambis.org.

Be sure to pick up or download extra surveys to share with people you care about. And don't forget to mention that we have knowledgeable speakers available to talk to any group or organization to which you belong. Let's spread the word!

The FCA: Supporting Consumers from Sea to Shining Sea

Rodger Ericson, FCA Vice President, AMBIS-FCA Liaison

One benefit of a national alliance of local FCA chapters like AMBIS is our connection with affiliates in other states, from coast to coast, sea to shining sea. In 2010, I first used this awareness when my son-in-law's mother was put on artificial life support in Colorado. My wife and I went to Denver to help with the grandchildren and support the family. Learning that cremation was their family choice, I also realized they had not done any homework. By calling our Colorado FCA chapter we found a reputable cremation provider which also enabled savings of nearly \$2000 compared to the default "just down the road" funeral home, which they otherwise would have used.

Last November, a friend's brother was dying in Rochester, NY. Knowing of a possible FCA affiliate in that area, I found the FCA of Greater Rochester. The family learned some unknown options, eventually saved some big bucks and received the helpful service they didn't know they needed. As often is true, this family knew death was imminent, but had not thought about "shopping." "Thank you so much," the family wrote after his death. Earlier in 2012 I guided someone to our Piedmont chapter in North Carolina and shared with a lady in Dallas how to find the best price for a cremation. Also in 2012 I told a man in Dallas about a "home funeral" and he decided to "undertake" his father's funeral without commercial assistance; he then did it and raved about the personal satisfaction of that experience.

AMBIS enables you to help others – beyond Central Texas. Go to <www.funerals.org> to see where other FCA affiliates are located. Then when an opportunity arises, "near your friend's location" you can help someone **you** know and love. One of my great satisfactions is to help someone discover how they can have a meaningful and dignified funeral at a reasonable cost.

A SPECIAL THANKS to everyone who donates to the FCA to sustain our national alliance. Oh, and by the way, read the articles on the high cost of funerals in the November, December, and January issues of *Money* magazine – the articles were written with help from Josh Slocum, our FCA executive director.

Exploring End-of-Life Options

Register now for this 8-session AMBIS course offered through the Lifetime Learning Institute

Topics include:

- Exactly what funeral homes in our area charge for cremation, burial, and other services
- Ways to reduce funeral, cremation, and burial costs
- Living Wills and other advance planning documents
- Hospice care
- Organ, tissue, and whole body donation programs
- "Do-It-Yourself" funerals if you don't want to use a funeral home
- Eco-friendly natural burial options in the Greater Austin Area
- Burial benefits for veterans and their spouses
- Keys to writing memorable obituaries, eulogies, and legacy letters

Download registration form at <www.lliaustin.org>
or call LLI at 512-206-4232.

Be a friend! Tell a friend! Bring a friend!

When: Thursdays, 1 to 3 p.m., February 14 through April 4, 2013

Where: Triumphant Love Lutheran Church
9508 Great Hills Trail, Austin, TX 78759

Cost: \$20 for 8 sessions + \$10 at first class session for handouts

What participants are saying:

"The one most helpful course I have ever taken. No marketing – just options and invaluable information. ... The entire Austin community should be educated on such an important topic."

"I found out answers about information I did not think I needed to know!!"

"I enjoyed the informal atmosphere that encouraged questions and comments."



Swan Songs, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization based in Austin, fulfills musical wishes by organizing private concerts for individuals facing the end of life.

Swan Songs concerts are available, upon request, for terminally ill patients in the central Texas area, whether they are in the hospital, in a hospice facility, or at home. Usually, the request comes from a family member, friend, physician, minister, or hospice care provider. The very intimate 20-40 minute concerts are intended to grant a musical wish, whether it is a specific local musician or a certain style of music.

Once the concert is scheduled, a Swan Songs volunteer accompanies the performer to the concert location. The performer is paid by Swan Songs, with no financial commitment on the part of the patient or their family. The family's privacy is respected throughout the entire process. More information about this wonderful service at <www.swansongs.org/index.html> or by calling 512-416-7926.

AMBIS thanks members who actively supported us in 2012 ...

Without your help, we could not do the work we do!

Thank you for donating your time and your skills ...

staffing our office, answering after-hours calls, making presentations, interviewing Council nominees, planning events, translating written materials, collecting general price lists, and more:

Frances Allen	Alana Carpenter-Moore	George Hawkins	Ellen Macdonald	Ron Turner
Beverly Allen	Monika Cavazos	June Hankins	Eileen Moe	Barbara Tuttle
Chauncey Ashburn	Phyllis Dahlke	Lamar Hankins	Leo Osterhaus	Tom Twiss
Maxine Barkan	Rita DeBellis	Clint Henderson	Amy Praskac	Maria-Luisa Urdaneta
Sandy Booth	Frances Gibich	Virginia Kniesner	Jacqueline Rixen	Nancy Walker
Helen Burnette	Don Harris	Gary Lichtenstein	Jo Schneider	Daesene Willmann

Thank you for serving on our Governing Council in 2012:

Alana Carpenter-Moore	Rita DeBellis	Don Harris	Mickey Michaels
Monika Cavazos	Rodger Ericson	Karen Larson	Nancy Walker
Kristi Curry	Ovelio Fernandez	Jake Lorfing	John Yeaman

Thank you for donating notary services, library materials, office equipment and supplies, and 'Gone for Good' items:

Marjorie Abell	Frank & Barb Dewhurst	Clint Henderson	Nancy Walker
Frances Allen	Frances Gibich	Mickey Michaels	Daesene Willmann
Arnold & Chauncey Ashburn	Lamar Hankins	Maria-Luisa Urdaneta	John Yeaman

Donors and New Members, thank you for your financial support:

Abiding Love Lutheran Church	Herman & Lillian Burch	Patsy De Luna	Patsy Frasier
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President's Message

Dear Friends of AMBIS,

Looking back at 2012, I am deeply grateful for our volunteers and for all our members who have supported AMBIS in so many ways. AMBIS continues to move forward because hundreds of you gave us your time, your creativity, and your financial support throughout the year. **Thank you!**

A **big** welcome to 80 new member households, 15 of which were gift memberships from AMBIS members! What a great win-win way to grow!

As we head into the new year, we will continue streamlining and expanding the ways in which we educate and serve everyone who looks to us for end-of-life information they can count on.

We are developing a new web site that will provide helpful information about several topics not included on our current web site.

For those of you interested in a wide variety of timely and thought-provoking articles about the many facets of death care, we are continually adding new items to our [Facebook](#) page, which you'll find by searching on Facebook for "Austin Memorial" (rather

than for "AMBIS"). Remember: you don't have to **join** Facebook to read [our page](#).

This year, our annual funeral home survey will be available **February 16** – at our annual meeting, in our office, and on our website in an easy-to-print format. As always, we will mail surveys to anyone who requests them.

To make it easier and more convenient for people to join or donate to AMBIS, the Council will soon be looking at expanding payment options, so our speakers and office volunteers can accept charge cards in our office and at presentations, meetings, and fairs.

As for our laptop, projector, and portable screen, we'd like to show them off this year, so invite us to make a presentation to a group with which you are affiliated.

Because **everything** we do is done by volunteers, we are eager for you to find an opportunity that you will enjoy. The possibilities are nearly limitless, so let's talk about them while the year is still new.

Nancy Walker

512-480-0251; president@fcaambis.org

When a U. S. Citizen Dies Abroad

When a U.S. citizen dies abroad, the Bureau of Consular Affairs will locate and inform the next-of-kin of the U.S. citizen's death and provide information on how to make arrangements for local burial or return of the remains to the United States. The disposition of remains is subject to U.S. law, local laws of the country where the individual died, U.S. and foreign customs requirements, and the foreign country facilities, which are often vastly different from those in this country.

The Bureau of Consular Affairs assists the next-of-kin in conveying instructions to the appropriate offices within the foreign country, and provides information to the family on how to transmit the necessary private funds to cover the costs overseas. The Department of State has no funds to assist in the return of remains or ashes of U.S. citizens who die abroad. Upon issuance of a local death certificate, the nearest embassy or consulate may prepare a Consular Report of the Death of an American Abroad. Copies of that report are provided to the next-of-kin or legal representative and may be used in U.S. courts to settle estate matters.

A U.S. consular officer overseas has statutory responsibility for the personal estate of a U.S. citizen who dies abroad if the deceased has no legal representative or next-of-kin in the country where the death occurred, subject to local law. In that situation, the consular officer takes possession of personal effects, such as jewelry, personal documents and papers, and clothing. The officer prepares an inventory and then carries out instructions from the legal representative or next-of-kin concerning the effects.

For specific information concerning return of remains of a deceased U.S. citizen, go to http://travel.state.gov/travel/tips/emergencies/death/death_1191.html. You may also contact the appropriate geographic division of the Office of American Citizens Services, Department of State, SA-29. 2201 C Street, NW, Washington, DC 20520. From within the U.S.: 1-888-407-4747; from outside the U.S.: 1-202-501-4444, or contact the consular officer in the American Citizens Services Section of the U.S. embassy or consulate in the foreign country where the death occurred.

For more information on the *Consular Report of the Death of an American Abroad*, and other services that a consular officer can help you with when a loved one passes away overseas, see the links at

http://travel.state.gov/travel/tips/emergencies/death/death_3878.html.

An Important Message for E-Newsletter Subscribers

If this newsletter was **mailed** to you, it is because we received no confirmation in early January that emails from AMBIS were getting through to you. To ensure that you would receive this newsletter, we sent it to you by both mail **and** email.

If, in fact, you were able to receive the newsletter electronically (and we haven't already heard from you), **please email us** at newsletter@fcaambis.org so that we can add you to our list of **confirmed** e-subscribers.

New e-subscribers are also welcome to contact us at the same email address.

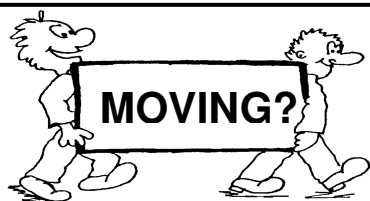
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Winter 2013

AMBIS Mission Statement

AMBIS, a member of the national Funeral Consumers Alliance, is a nonprofit, nonsectarian, educational consumer organization that encourages and assists Central Texans in making informed, practical end-of-life decisions.



Send address, email and phone
number changes, editorial items,
testimonials, letters, and inquiries
to: office@fcaambis.org

~ OR ~



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